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May Watson's words on "Empire" convey my thoughts to you on our Hospital:

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The Story of the Bell Singers

IN 1939, several music educators suggested that there should be provided in Toronto an opportunity for girl graduates of high schools to continue the choral experience they had enjoyed as students. Accordingly, a group was organized under the name of the "Toronto Alumnae Choir". The "alumnae" idea found immediate favour, and it was not long before over twenty different Canadian high schools were represented in the choral group.

The Choir early appeared over C.B.C. and Columbia networks in a series of recitals. This was followed by other radio engagements and the recording of the group by the RCA Victor Co. The Choir's greatest success, however, has been on the concert stage. It has given over 100 public performances, many of them in company with foremost Canadian musicians. Recently, offers have come from New York for a tour of the United States.

As part of their contribution towards the war effort, the girls have entertained Army and Air Force camps in all parts of Ontario. Without exception, each of these appearances has been followed by a request for a return visit.

Believing, as Augustus Bridle has said, that "choral supremacy depends mainly on virtuosity in unaccompanied singing", the Choir confines its activity entirely to a capella work. The greater part of its repertoire consists of vocal arrangements written especially to suit its unusual capabilities by the two directors of the Choir.

The singers show an enthusiastic response to the exacting discipline under which they are trained. Replacements in the membership are decided by a series of auditions held chiefly in the Spring of the year. Admission is now no longer confined to members of former high school groups, but is available to any girl between the ages of 16 and 22 who possesses an unspoiled voice, the ability to read well and a capacity for hard work. In view of the fact, therefore, that the term "alumnae" has now lost much of its former significance, it has been deemed advisable to change the Choir's name. The girls, themselves, have chosen the new title "Bell Singers", and take the present opportunity of announcing the fact to the public.

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Programme

I. Scene 1: OLD WORLD CATHEDRAL

Prelude: KYRIE (from the "Missa Alma Pater") - - - - Gregorian Chant

1. POPULE MEUS, QUID TIBI FECI? ("Hear, O My People") - Vittoria-Strickling

Tomas Luis de Vittoria, a Spanish composer of the later 16th centry was one of the greatest contemporaries of Palestrina, and like him, a writer of unaccompanied church music, then at its climax. The antiphonal work "Popule Meus" was written to satisfy the demands of both the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches. The main choir sings in Mediaeval Latin and the responses are delivered in Greek.

2. ALLELUIA - Mozart

This brilliant and well-known work was written originally for accompanied singing. The a capella version presents some passages of exceptional difficulty.

3. Two Songs of the Nativity: Arranged by Bell

(a) DORMI JESU - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Latin American

(b) FALANTIDING - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Tyrolese

These two songs have a distinctly national flavour. "Dormi Jesu" ("Sleep, Little Jesus") is of Chilean origin. It is really a cradle song, in which the Virgin Mary sings a lullaby to the Infant Jesus. "Falantiding" tells the traditional Christmas story in a light, cheerful manner.

4. AVE MARIA - Schubert

THE BELL SINGERS

II. 1. MINUET L'ANTICO - - - - - - - - - - - - - - W. C .E. Seeboeck

2. SHEEP MAY SAFELY GRAZE - - - - - - - - - - - - Handel-Howe

3. TOCATTA AND FUGUE IN D MINOR - Bach (arr. by Malcolm and Godden

MALCOLM AND GODDEN

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3rd Sopranos — Muriel Lee, Joy Leuty, Dorothy Hamilton, Eleanor Quance, Evelyn Van Sickle.

4th Sopranos — Nora Pinch, Ruth Collier, Joan Monteith, Rose Wintonek, Gwendolyn Montgomery.

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3rd Contraltos — Edna Barlow, Margaret Black, Roxie England, Irene Taylor, Muriel Handy.

4th Contraltos — Mary Perkins, Pat Robins, Mary Wicks, Betty Speight, Emilie Bratkowski, Mary McLeod.

PROGRAMME — Continued

III. Scene 2: RUSSIAN VILLAGE

Prelude: EXCERPT FROM THE FIFTH SYMPHONY - - - Tschaikowsky

1. LEGEND - - - - - - - - - - Tschaikowsky (arranged by Bell)

An old Russian legend says that once when Christ was a child, He was weaving a garland of roses for Himself in His garden. A group of cruel children passing by laughed at Him and pressed a crown of thorns on His head.

2. A VIOLIN IS SINGING IN THE STREET - - - Ukrainian Folk Song

This song pictures a young girl weeping over her spinning wheel. Out in the street the peasants are dancing gaily, but the girl's mother has forbidden her to join them. In the music we hear the complaint of the unhappy maiden and the strains of the village band in the distance.

3. CHORAL TRANSCRIPTION FROM "SCHEHEREZADE" - - - - - Rimsky-Korsakow (arranged by Bell)

Rimsky-Korsakow called the third movement of his "Scheherezade" Suite "The Young Prince and the Princess", but left no further programme note to explain its meaning; hence the listener is free to find in it what he chooses. The choral version presented here interprets the music as a story of the love of the prince for his princess. The words are by F. D. Roy.

4. Two Dance Tunes:

(a) TRADI NUKA - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Latvian

(b) RUSSIAN SAILORS' DANCE - - - - - - - - - - - - Glière

The dance music of the Russian people is characterized by speed and strongly marked rhythm. "Tradi Nuka" is a particularly gay tune with imitative sound effects. In the "Russian Sailors' Dance" the voices produce a climactic effect by beginning in unison and ending in eight parts.

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PROGRAMME — Continued

IV. Scene 3: GEORGIA PLANTATION

Prelude: SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHERLESS CHILE

1. JOSHUA FIT DE BATTLE O' JERICHO

2. HE NEVER SAID A MUMBLIN' WORD

These two numbers are representative of the two main types of spirituals. The first is an example of the "shoutin' spiritual" and is in decided contrast to the quiet dignity of the second. Like all spirituals, however, they are both expressions of intense religious feeling.

3. Two Spirituals by Charles Rittenhouse: (arranged by Bell)

(a) MY LORD JESUS CAME DOWN

(b) DARK VALLEY

Charles Rittenhouse of Montreal has written several spirituals and has, in his work, succeeded in achieving a sincerity of mood so often missed by imitators of negro music. These two works were composed especially for the Bell Singers.

4. CHORAL RHAPSODY FROM "PORGY AND BESS" - - - - Gershwin

George Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess" with its portrayal of negro life and temperament is recognized as an important contribution to American opera. This choral arrangement is a medley of four of the most important songs from the opera: "A Woman is a Sometime Thing", "Summertime", "It Ain't Necessarily So", and "I Got Plenty o' Nuttin' ".

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PROGRAMME — Continued

V. 1. FETES - - - - - - - - Debussy (arranged by Malcolm and Godden)
2. WALTZ - Arensky
3. LA CAMPANELLA - - Paganini-Liszt (arranged by Malcolm and Godden)

MALCOLM AND GODDEN

VI. Scene 4: MODERN SALON
Prelude: AIR FOR THE G STRING - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Bach
1. FOG - Sandburg-Stone

The fog comes on little cat feet.
It sits looking over harbour and city
On silent haunches,
And then moves on.

This little fragment of Carl Sandburg's is one of the gems of modern American poetry. In the musical setting, an unusual pictorial effect is achieved by having a group of contraltos sing the words in recitative style against a choral background of consecutive fifths.

2. Two Folk Songs - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Arranged by F. D. Roy
(a) BENDEMEER'S STREAM - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Irish
(b) THE ROAD TO THE ISLES - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Scottish

Two well-known and beloved melodies are presented in new arrangements. "The Road to the Isles" is writen in the form of a patrol, in which we hear the Scottish Highlanders approaching from the distance and marching past.

3. VALSE: THE EMPEROR - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Strauss-Bell

In this free transcription of one of Strauss's finest waltzes, a familiar story is told. Two lovers, knowing well that "love is fleeting as a gathered rose", resolve to live for the moment in the gaiety of the dance. The words are by Charles Rittenhouse.

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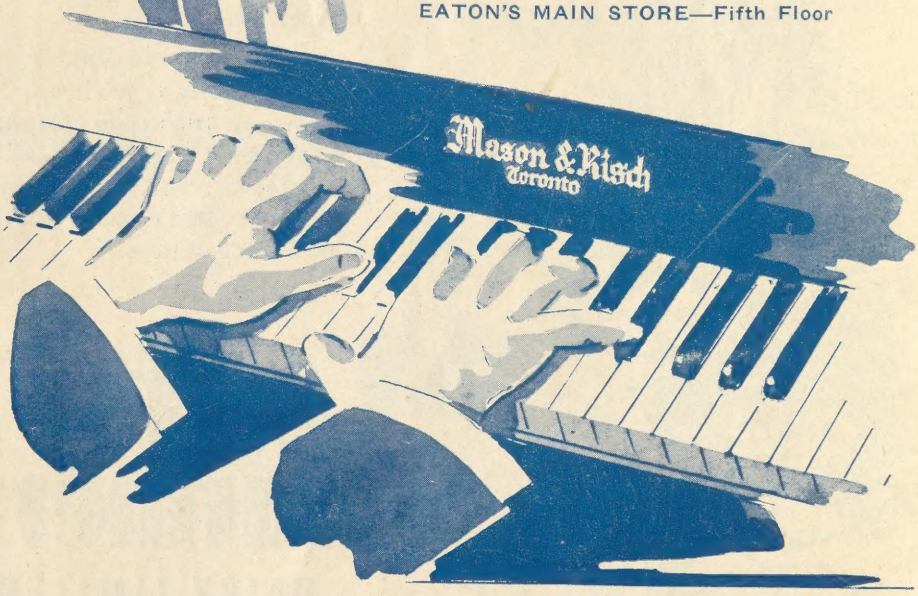
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